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CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Building A City Church

St. James's Church

Philadelphia

Advent 1928

"Building a City Church" is the fourth in a series of statements sent out in the last three years. The others have gone only to parishioners of St. James's. This one is sent out more widely because it touches on some aspects of a problem in which all city dwellers are, or should be, interested. I hope it may turn out to be a contribution to that problem's solution. The actual building of a City Church at St. James's is opening the eyes of many to a field white for the harvest.

John Mockridge

Advent, 1928.

The Problem
of the
City Church

Since the beginning of the century ten Episcopal Churches have moved from Central Philadelphia. Where there were 18 there now are 8.

There has never been even an attempt to deal with the "problem of the City Church"; each Church deals with its own problem, and what has so far happened is that each one cashes in on its real estate values and moves. There are figures that appear to justify this policy. The eight Churches left in Central Philadelphia had 8618 communicants and 1907 Sunday School Scholars in 1917. Ten years later they had 7033 communicants and 1154 in their Schools. The process of removal has been accepted as normal and proper. Is it?

If it continues there will be two Episcopal Churches in 1950. The two will be Christ Church and St. Peter's, and they will be not so much Churches as historical and architectural monuments. The Episcopal Church in Philadelphia will have become suburban.

The Suburban
Church

A suburban Church is exactly what its name implies—it is the Church of a suburb. It has its own proper and necessary uses. Its ministry is valuable, its influence beneficent. It is, however, no more a substitute for the City Church than the Bryn Mawr Trust Company is for the Girard Trust Company, the Overbrook Station for the Broad Street Station, the "Naborhood Store" for Wanamaker's, the

local Movie for the Aldine Theatre or the community Country Club for the Penn Athletic Club.

If there are to be no central Churches, but only suburban, we shall have established in the public mind the idea that religion has no place in the heart of a great city's life, and that its proper embodiment is the comfortable, easily managed and cheaply financed suburban Church.

The Coming
City

What is happening in Central Philadelphia is not the revamping of it so as to make it more convenient as a place in which to work and to shop. There is being created here a cultural, residential and amusement centre that, in a few years, will make Central Philadelphia as famous for its splendor and dignity, as Philadelphia's suburbs have long been for their comfort and their beauty. The Art Museum and the Library, the huge hotels and apartment houses, the expanding Hospitals, the new great Theatres—no less than the banks, office buildings, shops and railroad terminals, are embodiments of a rich and varied communal life, and an increasingly populous one.

The City
and
The Church

It is this population that presents a new problem to the Church. It is a population new in character, in outlook and in habits because modern urban life is itself brand new.

But the people are just people. They are hard to reach, they move often: but there are no people that have sharper need for the knowledge of a Father who loves them, a Saviour who cares, a Church as their spiritual home.

Suburban religion has exactly as much chance of reaching them as has the suburban movie. The ordinary "Parish Church" with its pew rents will not reach them either. They know they do not belong: it is too exclusive. If religion is to reach them at all it must be through Churches new in outlook and methods, big enough and strong enough to carry out large scale programmes of worship and of work.

A City
Church

The question is: Is this rapidly developing urban life—fascinating, splendid, great—to be without any Churches, without any witnesses to the eternal verities, the supreme values, in human life? The men who are making the greater city are beginning to see the danger of denuding the city's centre of its Churches. There emerges the conception of the "City Church." What is it? It is *not* a Cathedral. There are three cities that have both Cathedrals and great "City Churches,"—London, Paris and New York. St. Paul's Cathedral, Notre Dame and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine are wholly different from St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, the Madeleine and Trinity Church.

The Cathedral and the City Church are not rivals

or competitors. The Cathedral is the spiritual home of the people of the Diocese, the centre of Diocesan life, the Bishop's Church. The City Church exists to propagate the Christian Gospel in a particular set of circumstances, to exhibit and expound Christian life and Christian worship in the midst of crowded city life.

The City Church puts itself in line with the life of the City. It is a Church that appeals, not to a selected group of pew-holders, but to city dwellers at large. Its services should be as various as are human needs, and as beautiful and dignified as God's worship can be made. Its pulpit should carry messages of strength and help from men who, freed from financial and administrative tasks, have time for meditation, reading and study. In the field of religious music the City Church has special facilities. In religious education it makes trial of new methods, of lecture courses, study classes, group conferences. On its staff will be at least one man whose chief task is the making of personal contacts.

All this suggests a large programme on a large scale and may stand for an outline picture of a Church, its buildings ever freely open, that will have at least a chance to minister to those who live "under a smoke in a great noise." Offering itself thus to city dwellers it will win and hold as its Vestrymen city men of affairs whose relationship to it will be analogous to their relationship to their other city directorships. The plane of their thought and action about the City Church will

be the same as the plane of their thought and action about city Museums, Libraries, Hospitals and Banks.

How is the City Church to be supported financially? The common idea that a given Church should be supported by the current gifts of those who from time to time attend it is fantastic and absurd in connection with a City Church. No one expects the financial support of the Art Museum to come from the thousands who wander through its galleries. Nobody suggests that the Pennsylvania Hospital should be supported by the patients in its rooms and wards, that the Library is in bad shape because it is not "self-supporting," or that the expenses of the Orchestra should be kept within the limits of the box office receipts. Wherein does a City Church differ from any of these so far as its finances are concerned? The munificent gifts of wealthy Philadelphians to their great new cultural institutions are worthy of high praise. Such giving is a subtle but very real influence in the immediate and widespread public use and appreciation of these institutions. When wealthy Philadelphia Churchmen deal similarly with their City Churches, the same results may be expected.

It is a fine thing to make it possible for the general public to see great pictures, to hear good music, to have ready access to the best literature in magnificent buildings with splendid appointments. Is it not at

least as fine a thing to make it possible for the general public to enjoy God's worship in surroundings that suggest His Majesty and Glory, under conditions at least measurably on the same plane as are the pictures, the music and the books?

This suggests that the City Churches, like the other great cultural temples, must have solid and adequate financial foundations. There need be no more fear of inadequate response from city dwellers in the case of a Church than in the case of the Museum.

Religion and
Modern Life

No serious person can feel entirely happy about some of the tendencies of modern city life. If the growing up of splendid Museums and Libraries, the opening up of Boulevards and Avenues point to expanding culture, to increasing civilization, there are evidences in plenty of a seamy side to city life that are very disturbing. Police corruption, political chicanery, banditry, and other lawlessness, are not the only manifestations. Even more serious is the tendency on the part of some large religious bodies to turn themselves into semi-political organizations for the ostensible purpose of "eradicating lawlessness and vice." Not that way will the Kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of Our God and of His Christ.

It is in the great cities that the struggle for righteousness, for decent living, for good citizenship, for faith in God and in man's spiritual destiny is keenest.

It is therefore here that the very best and highest that religion has to offer should find vigorous expression and strong embodiment. It is in the heart of the city that there should be powerful centres of God's truth, shot through with His sacrificial love for men, their very buildings calling out "My ways are higher than your ways, saith the Lord."

St James's a City Church St. James's history and tradition, no less than the conditions it now faces, mark it out as a Church always ready to meet great emergencies. Bishop White, the Founder and first Rector of the Church, was a statesman. The broad sweep of his mind is written into the founding of the Episcopal Church in this country. The planting of a third Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in 1806 is witness to his bold and venturesome imagination. For thirty years he fostered this Church's growth, handing it on at his death in 1836 to a young man who for 6 years had been under his training as his assistant, the Rev. Henry J. Morton. Dr. Morton after thirty years as Rector carried on the statesmanlike boldness of his predecessor by moving St. James's from Seventh and Commerce Streets to its present site and putting up the building we now use. This was in 1869-70, and, with Dr. Morton in charge until 1887, St. James's grew and prospered as a family Church of great strength set in the midst of its well-to-do people. It became widely known for its varied

works, for its large congregations, for its excellent music and dignified worship. But from the year 1909 there is to be noticed a change. The then Rector, Dr. W. C. Richardson, foresaw what was coming and tried to have it provided for. His foresight was accurate but, as so often happens with seers, he died at sixty-four worn out by his failure to get the situation recognized and met. By 1915 the developing problem had reached a point where people said "something must be done" and nobody knew what that something might be. In the following years, especially from 1919, there was made as complete and exhaustive a study of the situation as was ever made in connection with any Church. No suggested solution, no practical plan was left unexplored.

Meantime difficulties became acute. In 1925 it was realized that the time for study was over, that the day of decision had arrived, and the Rector and Vestry unanimously resolved to attempt to equip St. James's to function as a "City Church."

Getting Ready There have followed three years of the steady working out of practical details. Pewholders were, most of them, pew owners. In many cases the pew at St. James's was a valued legacy. Around it had grown tender associations. The disturbing of all this was not without its dangers, but to their great and lasting credit the pewholders of St. James's met

the request for the surrender of their rights with generous kindness. Most of them continued their pews as contributions. Some of them, and the number is growing, have endowed their pews. In all but the public announcement of the fact the seats at St. James's are already "free." The public announcement will be made on the first Sunday in the Centennial year, January 6, 1929.

St. James's alone amongst the Central Churches was without endowment. An "Endowment Fund" had indeed been started in 1881, but was never taken seriously. It was 31 years climbing to its first \$100,000, and one-quarter of this was invested in the old Rectory. At the end of 1925 the Fund amounted to \$128,000 of which \$35,000 was invested in the present Rectory.

To remedy this condition, two steps were proposed:

- (1) The immediate sale of the Guild House property on Sansom Street.
- (2) The raising by 1929 of \$100,000 as a Centennial Fund for additional endowment.

The first step has not yet been taken. Changes in the neighborhood made and proposed seem likely to add considerably to the value of the property. It is to the great advantage of the Church to hold it for another year or more and arrangements for doing this have been made.

The second step, the raising of the Centennial Fund, seemed to some to be next to impossible. If St. James's in the days of its prosperity took 31 years to create an endowment fund of \$100,000, was there much chance of raising in times of change and uncertainty, \$100,000 in three years? St. James's people, however, are worthy heirs of their great tradition. With no money raising schemes, with no organized soliciting, with only the straightforward statement of the case as an appeal, they have already given or promised \$85,000 and there is every prospect that the full amount will be in hand by the end of the year.

It is a remarkable achievement.

**The
Centennial
Year**

In 1829 there was obtained from the Legislature a charter creating a body corporate under the name and style of "The Rector, Church-Wardens and Vestrymen of St. James's Church, Philadelphia." Up to this time Christ Church, St. Peter's and St. James's had been under one Charter, one Vestry and one Rector. Since 1829 St. James's has had its own Rector and Vestry, though Bishop White remained Rector until his death in 1836. In that year St. Peter's followed St. James's in setting up its own Vestry and calling its own Rector.

The year 1929 is thus the end of a century of this Church's corporate life. It will, as such, be observed with fitting historical events and services.

But 1929 is also the beginning of St. James's second century. As such it is proposed to celebrate by a continuous programme of services and other gatherings designed to show, at least to some extent, what a City Church can be and can do.

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This statement is intended to describe a real adventure for God. Central City Churches are not "down and out." It is sometimes said that in Philadelphia the Central Episcopal Churches are too close together, that there are too many of them. This is true only if these Churches continue to be thought of and dealt with as old fashioned "parish Churches." From this point of view they are just eight too many. There seems to be no reason, however, why, since it is the tendency in cities for great banks to group themselves closely together, these eight Churches, if run as City Churches, need regret their comparative nearness to each other. In the present writer's judgment eight Episcopal Churches run on City lines is none too many for so great a district as Central Philadelphia is swiftly becoming. What is needed is a new vision of the great city as a field to be won for God in new ways; and St. James's Church is determined, with God's help, to attempt some share of this fascinating task.